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Steam Fueled



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Chapter 1 by Davic

Max stood outside the Banking Clan's building. He'd been in there for quite some time now, maybe an hour.

"Cap was never the best negotiator," Max mumbled to himself.

He had only known The Captain for a few short weeks now, and he had a pretty good layout of his personality in his mind. Loud, arrogant; sly, charismatic; That's Cap. Max walked away from the pillar he had previously been leaning on.

"Maybe a quick peek, just to see how things are going," he decided.

The boy slowly made his way up the large stone stairs, passing many bankers and upper class citizens. The Banking Clan building was enormous in the city, and with good reason. The Bankers were very skilled at what they did, and brought coin into the city in droves.

Max was almost to the huge doors at the top of the stairs when yelling could be heard. And, only a few seconds later, out flew Captain and two Banking Clan guards. Each guard restrained one of

Cap's arms.

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"I say, How dare you! I will not be restrained by you! You are no Captain! You are a damned fool! Cap while raising his fist, I am a Captain, damn you!"

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Although his short speech was heroic, the uniformed guards threw him on the ground all the same. Max couldn't help but smile, Cap always did have the ability to make him laugh even if he wasn't trying.

"How'd things go, Captain," Max smirked.

Cap was picking himself up and brushing off his overcoat, then adjusting his hat.

"How did things go? Well Max, how'd you think they went," shuddered The Captain, "The nerve of some people, they said I wasn't a real Captain, therefore not eligible for a coin loan."

"Oh really, sir," Max replied as the people around them began to stare.

"They also said that using the money for booze was not an appropriate reason for getting a loan!"

The two started back down the stairs, while Cap continued his rant. Although, the airships overhead made it hard to hear his already loud voice. They were so large and complex. Gliding through the air with cargo or people aboard them. Max patiently awaited for his day to be able to sail on one; the rush of flying through the air was something he frequently dreamed of.

"If I ever see one of those Bankers in the slums, I'll... I'll," Cap trailed off. "You'll what," questioned Max who had admittedly not been listening.

"Why would a Banker be in the Slums," Groaned The Captain who was now disheartened and walking at half his original pace. Cap stuffed his hands into his overcoat and hung his head like a child. The two were now almost out of the Cloud District and entering the Slums. This was a noticeable thing, for the abundance of beggars and thugs who roamed the streets littered with garbage made it abundantly clear. As did the architecture which mostly consisted of wood, scrap metal, and tattered sheets of cloth.

"You know what Max, let's just leave," shouted The Captain removing his hands from his pockets

to strike a cheesy heroic pose. "You said your ship was in no traveling condition, and we don't have a crew. I can hardly fire a mic..."

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would always manage to get himself into some amount of trouble or debt. And, as usual, it was Max's quick thinking to get them out of the situation.

"Look kid," The Captain began, "I have enough money to get ourselves weaponry and supplies. We can make our own fortune out there in the open sky! Common' kid, what do you say?"

Max looked up at The Captain and smiled. With his dark black hair blowing in the breeze slightly protruding out from under his captains hat, he reminded Max of himself. The man was nearly a child at heart, yearning for adventure. Cap wanted to experience the world, and carve his mark right into time itself. How could he say no?

Chapter 2 by Harlander



The Captain had a plan, and there was only one place The Captain would share his plans: the Patched Pipe out on Wall Run. Wedged up between a municipal boiler-house on one side and a rubber boot factory on the other, it wasn't even disreputable enough to have character, but to The Captain it was a second home. Its one notable feature was a narrow viewing slit illicitly carved through the city's outer wall. Sitting at the table right beside it, one could look out over the great patchwork of farms, lumberyards and strip-mines that fed the ravenous city. It was Cap's favourite view, and he and Max had been seated there for half an hour as Cap worked his way towards the crux of his plans.

"Skyrock Island!" Cap exclaimed, almost knocking his glass over with his excited gesticulations. "Skyrock Island." Max echoed, unimpressed. Every sailor with enough booze in him could tell a tale of the mythical floating island, laden with ancient riches beyond counting. "That's just an old coeliner's tale, Cap. What-"

The Captain cut off Max's objections. "That's what I thought!" he began, still animated. "But I've been looking through the second-hand cartographers' shops, and I found... this!" His last word punctuated his unrolling of a tattered sheet on the table. Though ripped and stained, its squiggles and lines were unquestionable. It was a map.

Chapter 2 by Harlander

With a chart to their destination, Max was feeling a lot more confident about The Captain's plan. "That's what I thought!" he began, still animated. "But I've been looking through the second-hand cartographers' shops, and I found... this!" His last word punctuated his unrolling of a tattered sheet on the table. Though ripped and stained, its squiggles and lines were unquestionable. It was a map.

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Of course, they'd need a crew. "No problem at all, kid, no problem at all," The Captain told Max. Most of the crew of an airship were mere rope-pullers. Any needed skills could be learned on the job. Any old rabble would do - the more downtrodden the better. Factory workers, the healthier beggars, drunkards. People desperate to escape their pathetic existence would follow a man into all kinds of danger.

Specialists were a different question. The engineer's post was filled, at least. Max could make an airship's engine sing like an angel. They'd need a carpenter, a ship's surgeon, and a trained navigator besides. "Where in the aether are we going to find a navigator crazy enough to join us?" Max grieved after the fourth day of searching. Their crew was taking shape, with roughnecks, criminals, and down-and-outs trickling in to the Patched Pipe to sign on to the endeavour. A few of them even had diriging experience. As night fell over the city, The Captain settled in to get himself nicely lubricated as a reward for their success to date, and Max settled in to making sure The Captain didn't fall down an open sewer before they even set off on their quest.

The pub hummed with low conversations, but silence fell at the rattle of the door. A figure, impossibly tall, stood in the doorway, hunched to keep from brushing its head on the ceiling. It was wrapped in a long cloak, its face in shadow but for a pair of red glints.

The pub's patrons watched uneasily as the figure strode up to The Captain's table. It stepped into the candlelight, and its 'face' could be seen. It was a mask of copper, inlaid with gold, and with a pair of faceted rubies in place of eyes. The figure spoke. Its voice was a monotone, like metal parts sliding together.

+YOU+SEEK+THE+ISLE+OF+THE+MANUFACTURERS+, the voice uttered, its words separated by soft clicks. Max and The Captain could only stare for a few moments, before Max managed to splutter out an affirmative.

+YOU+REQUIRE+A+NAVIGATOR+THIS+ONE+WILL+SERVE+REFUSAL+IS+NOT+ACCEPTABLE+.

The uneasy silence flooded back to fill the pub. The assembled drunks tensed, ready to flee.

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The Captain rose imperially, his hand on his hip, and held out his hand.

"Welcome aboard."

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Chapter 4 by Harlander



While the Captain was busy gathering up the last few specialists they'd need - his latest recruit was an old souse of a surgeon who'd been struck off by the League of Blood and Bone for staggering into the operating theatre in a haze of liquor - Max set his sights on getting the Captain's ship skyshape.

He'd talked a mistreated carpenter's apprentice into running away from the job, and they'd taken the day to go over the ship from stem to stern, noting down each part that needed fixing. A couple of notebooks later, they'd covered everything. By some miracle, the liftbag was intact. Patching it up wouldn't have been a problem, but getting hold of the liftgas was a whole other kettle of fish. As it was, most of the work involved patching up the hull.

Max organised a few groups from the crew they'd recruited so far. Their job was to scour the city for any solid-looking pieces of wood that no-one would notice when they suddenly disappeared. There were dozens of collapsed buildings in the wharf district alone that no-one had touched in years, not to mention the scrapyards and construction sites scattered across the city.

Max was a little surprised when a pair of brothers had manhandled a whole billboard down to the dock, though. It still had the advert for Crasterwell's Puissant Cough Linctus and Drain Cleaner on the side. Chopped into planks, it was enough to patch up the entire top deck, and the advertising slogans would paint over well enough.

After a couple of weeks work, the ship looked almost presentable. It might just make it out onto the air. Would it make it to Skyrock Island? Only time would tell.

Chapter 5 by Harlander



The last of the preparations were complete. The Navigator had appeared the night before departure, carrying something that looked unsettlingly like a coffin - lifting it one-handed. It had taken this item down into the lower deck of the ship and bolted it to the floor, and hooked it into

the airship's engine via a series of spaking linkages the like of which Max had never seen. The crew of vagabonds and neer-do-wells that gathered in the morning, none of them carrying more than a few

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As the hour of their departure drew nigh, the assembled crew began to grow nervous. They muttered to each other as they waited on deck. Where was the Captain? Max only smiled. In the month or so he'd known the Cap, the old blowhard had never been able to resist making a dramatic entrance.

There was a shout from among the gathered crew. Max turned to follow the sudden focus of attention - and there was the Cap, standing proud on the prow of the airship.

"Gentlemen," he began. It wasn't the best possible start. More than a few women had been keen on the Captain's promises of adventure and riches, not to mention the new carpenter, whose bright hair-ribbons offset her sturdy dungarees in a fashion Max found quite fetching - and the glare they favoured Cap with was enough to make even him stammer for a moment.

"Assembled voyagers, my crew," he began again, smoothing over the situation, "We stand here today on the cusp of a voyage of discovery that will echo through the ages. We go to seek knowledge and riches beyond the dreams of lesser m... lesser folk. And the vessel to bear us on such a journey deserves a name worthy of the task. Friends, I give you... the *Seeker*."

The Cap clapped his hands, and Max tugged on a rope he'd prepared beforehand. The canvas shrouding the outside of the airship's liftbag fell away, revealing the brightly-painted bulbous structure, proudly bearing the image of a great rainbow-feathered bird, its wings wrapping the bag.

"And now, without further ado," Cap went on, cutting through the appreciative murmurs, "let us lift!"

Ropes were slackened and released, and with a final, long creak, the *Seeker* took to the sky.

Chapter 6 by Noble



As the *Seeker* rose above the smog clouds of the city, Max gazed out to see the other colorless airships drifting around the city. He looked around to see the Cap at the forecastle deck, a foot

on a small crate and ambition in his eyes.

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"Max my boy!" The Cap chuckled. He gestured Max to come to him.

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"Yrs Cap?" Max stood at attention. The Cap smiled. "Good. Now, let's get this ship moving."

"Come here and have a glass of this!" The Cap opened the small wooden crate to see a bottle of rum nested by a generous amount of tissue paper. It was a gift from the Patched Piper, hopefully not the last. Cap handed Max a steel mug and poured for him before he helped himself right after.

"+CAPTAIN+COURSE+SET+FOR+SKY+ROCK+ISLAND+" The copper-masked humanoid suddenly appeared behind the Cap, making him jump.

"God damn you almost made me spill my expensive rum!" The Cap exclaimed. "Hmmm you're gonna need a name.....How about Scary asshole?"

"NAME+UNACCEPTABLE+CALL+ME+JANUS+" The mask optics whirred occasionally as if it was scanning something. Janus was wearing light metallic armor salvaged from an ancient marooned ship years ago. He also wore arm braces that can spring wolf claws if needed.

"Aye, Janus then. Get to the bridge and make sure the helmsman doesn't ram us into a mountain" The Cap took a sip of his expensive rum.

Moments pass until the Ocean was right underneath them. The sound of seagulls calling and the wind against the balloons filled Max with a feeling of calmness. There were two large identical crates sitting in the middle of the deck, both marked with red skull seal emblem. Max ignored it for the time being.

As the Seeker continued to propel towards the fabled Skyrock Island, Max was called by the Cap again into the bridge.

"Aye sir?" Max could see the Cap beside a wide table littered with maps and drawings.

"Have you ever seen Skyrock Island?" Cap seemed amazed. "It's a literal Sky-Rock island, with the floating island and all that."

The Cap spent hours with Max planning about what to retrieve from the island when suddenly they both heard yelling from the main deck.

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"BANDITS! OFF THE PORT BOW!" A crewman yelled. The crew can see an airship that's in even worse shape than the one they were chasing. The airship is heavily damaged and stolen Imperial light cannons. The rest of the crewmen scattered to their positions in a panic. The Cap chuckled.

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"What's so funny Cap?"

"I got me a little present from my friend" The Cap lit a pipe and hung it in his mouth. "OPEN THE CRATE YE BASTARDS"

The walls of the two crates in the middle of the deck tumbled down, to reveal two twin linked gatling guns complimented with ammunition boxes. The crewmen mounted them on a gun mount on each side of the ship.

"+ENEMY+WEAPON+ANALYSIS+LIGHT+IMPERIAL+CANNON+AND+INFANTRY RIFLES+"

"Time to play you godless barbarians" The cap exhaled a cloud of tobacco as he grinned.

Chapter 7 by [BLDE_79] LeMaironi- merry chrysler



The light cannons were slow and unfavorably low in damage. It was a wonder they still circulated when fusion gatlings exist.

In a matter of seconds, the hijacked ship was down for the count.

The Cap just laughed, and Janus clicked and whirred in possible ways that that was a Pyrrhic victory. The carpentress hugged Max from behind, which split Max between enjoying the gesture and deferring her to the Cap, who was her age.

"VICTORY+POSITIVE+LOSSES+FEW+DAMAGE+NONE"

"How's our fuel coming along, Janus?" spoke Max, from the embrace of the carpentress.

"FUEL+SUFFICIENT"

"Ammo?"

"AMMO+AT+SURPLUS"

"Booze?"

"ASSUMING+USAGE+STAYS+FIXED+SHORT+THREE+DAYS"

"Alert the Cap."

"ADDED+TO+QUEUE"

"Estimated time for repair?"

"SEVEN+DAYS"

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"Add to alert: Conditions in which the lady might swim to the Cap?"

"ADDED+TO+QUEUE"

With that, all the bystanders laughed and started the minor repairs.

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